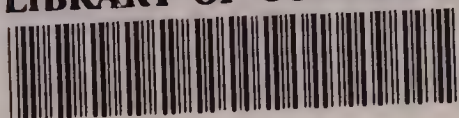


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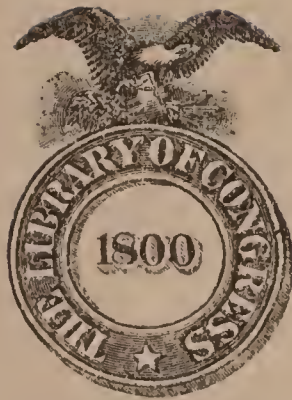


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OUTPOST MESSAGES

OUTPOST MESSAGES

BY
FANNY PURDY PALMER

WITH A BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH
BY HER DAUGHTER

"Break the dance and scatter the song,
Let some depart and some remain, . . .
PANTHEA. Ha! They are gone!
IONE. Yet feel you no delight
From the past sweetness?"

Chorus of Hours and Spirits
Shelley's "Prometheus Unbound"



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“I stood beside her, but she saw me not—
She looked upon the sea, and skies, and earth;
Rapture and love and admiration wrought
A passion deeper far than tears, or mirth,
Or speech, or gesture, or whate’er has birth
From common joy; which, with the speechless feeling
That led her there united, and shot forth
From her far eyes, a light of deep revealing,
All but her dearest self from my regard concealing.”

SHELLEY. “Laon and Cythna.” XI. 4.

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THE verses entitled by Mrs. Palmer *Outpost Messages* were written during the last four years of her life, when she was in her eighties. They supplement her *Sonnets of California*, 1909; *Of the Valley and the Sea*, 1912; and *Dates and Days in Europe*, 1914, and constitute a record of the closing years of an active and many-sided life.

Fanny Purdy was born in New York City, in 1839. The family were then living in a pleasant old house in Rutgers Street, at the East end of Canal Street, but within walking distance of St. John's Park and old St. Thomas' Church, where, according to the family Bible, her father and mother were married 'at five o'clock in the morning.' When she was three years old a small visitor at the house exclaimed upon her return home, "It's all true, Mr. Purdy's baby can read!" And indeed her love of books and romantic temperament were inherited from her father, while the early formed habit of thinking for herself was a characteristic of her mother's family, the Sharps, settled in Albany as fur traders during the Colonial period, and of the Loyalist Purdys of Revolutionary date:

My ancestors, 't is true, stood by their King,
Resigned their homesteads to the People's will,
And in Tioga's wilds—were loyal still!

In the neighborhood of 'Tioga's wilds'—in the family homes at Spencer, Elmira, Owego and Bath, my mother passed much of her girlhood, for her father died when she was quite young, leaving no other legacy than a well-stocked library of poetry and romance.

At the age of seven or eight she went, with her small cousin Judith, to live in the home of an energetic and

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educated lady, the wife of a sea captain who had retired to a farm. Here the instruction devised by Mrs. White, and carried on without the use of text-books, consisted in a constant round of piano practice and French dictation. Holidays were unknown. After the Sunday drive to church the little girls read *Pilgrim's Progress*, or looked at the illustrations in the large family Bible. On pleasant week-days they walked on the shell paths that bordered an old-fashioned garden, in which grew poppies and artemisia, and on gala occasions in winter the colored boy was permitted to draw the 'little ladies' about the grounds, on a large wooden sled. Pages of French poetry and prose were committed to memory during the long winter evenings, when—I have heard my mother say—the utmost felicity that could be extracted from life consisted in watching Captain White blow the chaff from the seeds he was preparing for market, or in coaxing the cat to come and lie in her lap. In after years, however, she fully recognized the value of this unique early training that furnished a solid background for her later education.

When she was fifteen or sixteen she began to write for a New York county newspaper, of which her uncle was editor, and a year later, for the *Home Journal*, and *Putnam's* and *Peterson's* magazines—tender, sentimental verses acceptable to the readers of that day, or lively narrative poems of some length, such as *Harold the Earl*:

Like the tall pine his form—
Upright against the storm—
His hand-clasp firm and warm
His locks bright flow
Made my swift Norse blood leap
With sudden glow.

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On her marriage in 1862 she accompanied my father, a surgeon in the Third New York Cavalry, to the South. During the war she was obliged to part with her father's early-Victorian library, only three volumes of which survived—his Bible, with passages from Shelley inscribed on the fly-leaves, and the complete poetical works of Byron and Thomas Moore. The latter must have been read and re-read by my mother in her early girlhood, for they are delicately penciled throughout with marginal notes and comments, as innumerable passages struck her fancy.

Oh! blissful meeting—in another world, of hearts thus purified—

exclaims the child of a romantic age, at the conclusion of the story of Zelica and Azim. And opposite the lines:

—one dear glance,
Like those of old, were heav'n!

she has written:

Alas, it may not be—when do we meet, as we have parted? In the present we may never react the past. The watchword of existence is—Change.

Quite recently, on hearing Thomas Moore referred to, my mother smiled, and began to repeat a long passage from *Lalla Rookh*, adding—with more loyalty than conviction, perhaps—"Yes, that is still poetry!"

Mrs. Palmer throughout the war contributed occasional short stories and verses to *Harper's Monthly* and *Harper's Weekly*, as well as letters to northern newspapers, and beginning with the first volume of *The Galaxy*, became a fairly frequent contributor at

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a time when Walt Whitman, Henry James, Jr., John Burroughs, Edward Everett Hale, Mark Twain, and others of our *literati* were writing for its pages.

In these early short stories, faintly reminiscent of the war, are some sympathetic studies of Southern negroes—blacks, quadroons, and octaroons. The story of *A Woman*, published in the *Galaxy* in 1866, with its central figure of a quadroon, is possibly the earliest portrait in our magazine literature of an emancipated slave—emancipated from serfdom, but not from inheritance and tradition. For my mother—no longer a Romanticist—but adopting the naturalistic method, is already seeking for cause and effect in race and environment, and the opening scene of desolation and foreboding supplies the *motif* of a theme, tragic but not fatalistic. She was not inclined to press racial analogies too far, and in the case of the colored people, whose fortunes she continued to follow with affectionate solicitude, she detected a strength of character and steadfastness of purpose that she had not dreamed of at the time of the war.

During the year following the close of the war, when my father was in charge of Stuart Hospital, at Richmond, Virginia, and after their removal to Rhode Island, my mother continued to write. From 1869, for an uninterrupted period of nearly twenty years she contributed a story, each month, to the columns of the *True Flag*. The character of this weekly is set forth in a flamboyant prospectus issued during the war:—

THE TRUE FLAG

A JOURNAL FOR EVERY HOME

Acknowledged to be the pioneer newspaper of its class, having originated the system of no continued stories, and no advertisements it has outlived a host of imitators and

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still distances all competitors. It is not limited to any class or district but cheers the homes and gladdens the firesides of every loyal state in the Union. Our corps of contributors comprise the liveliest story tellers and numbers many of the best authors of the day. In respect to the future we shall faithfully adhere to our own well-trying system of avoiding tedious novelettes and giving each week throughout the year a condensed and spicy compendium of reading for the people.

My mother's connection with this paper was a fortunate one, for the *True Flag* was edited by an enlightened and cultivated Boston gentleman, Mr. William U. Moulton, whose wife, Louise Chandler Moulton, was a frequent contributor, both before and after her marriage. The large circulation of the paper, and the fact that he took upon himself the burden of compilation, enabled Mr. Moulton to pay liberally the small staff of women contributors to whose talents he allowed free scope. The stories contributed by my mother nearly always fell short of the required length, but were invariably accepted, although she often jeopardized their fate by ending them according to her fancy, as in the case of *April and August*, where the hero—uniquely abandoned at the end of the tale—is left waiting in the parlor for an answer to his marriage proposal.

Mr. Moulton, for once, protested, and the ending was changed, but restored later, in a volume of stories that bore upon the title-page the motto:

For several virtues
Have I lik'd several women.

In these *True Flag* stories every known virtue of the sex is chronicled, for my mother was an ardent femin-

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ist. She had faith, especially, in the women who submit themselves to the discipline of professional life, and the frequency with which her heroines embark on professional careers could not have been without its effect upon the rising generation of *True Flag* readers.

Her first story for the *True Flag*—*Forever and Ever*—recounts the history of an orphan girl, the daughter of an organist, who completes her musical training and recovers her poise, after many trials. At the time this story was written I was two years, and my brother was three months, old.

At a very early age I recollect my mother as a grave and gracious presence that presided over my destinies. When I brought her my first bunch of wilting buttercups, she gathered them into her hands, and put them in a glass of water, where I watched them revive in the cool air of the nursery. One Christmas morning, when I stumbled on the stairs, and broke the bottle of cologne intended for her present—this calamity being announced by an outburst of tears in which my brother joined!—she comforted us by saying that it was a very pleasant thing to have christened the house with perfume! I next associate her with certain Sunday afternoons when one or two women writers met to read their manuscripts—meetings unfortunately timed, in the opinion of my brother and myself, as they interfered with the Shakespeare readings that were a regular feature of the day. I can see my brother, now, lying flat upon the parlor floor, and gazing up into my mother's face, as she read of "The man that once did sell the lion's skin while the beast liv'd. . ." Some years later she read aloud, *The Return of the Native*. I recall every detail of this reading—even to the fact that my mother paused and looked out of the window, when she came to the line—"A beauty with a black

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mane, and a face as white as snow." I realize now, that she made the utmost use of her slender resources. When I was sick she brought Landseer's engraving of the girl and deer from the parlor, and hung it on the wall opposite my bed, and on my return from a visit away from home she met me, looking very tall and elegant in a black gown with a train, and wearing rings on her fingers—having dressed thus, no doubt, to enliven the occasion! From her we children learned much of the poetry that she recited or sung to us, and many of the French phrases and literary allusions that flavored her conversation. On one of our walks, when she admired, or seemed to admire, a hand-painted Easter egg suspended by a blue ribbon in a shop window, and I offered to buy it for her, she replied with the utmost gravity: "We mustn't covet the flesh-pots of Egypt."

From the time of the Centennial I associate her more and more with local activities, as the meetings at our house increased in number and frequency, or assumed a public character. Suffrage meetings, with speakers from Boston, were inaugurated, and there were suffrage suppers famed for their good fellowship, and suffrage petitions for which few signatures could be obtained, and suffrage hearings before the Legislature from which the petitioners were annually 'given leave to withdraw.' And there were Sunday meetings, with a similar clientèle, of the Free Religious Society, and evening meetings of a Herbert Spencer club. And at the time, nothing came of these meetings but an intellectual awakening among a small group of people, and the enthusiastic discussions and affectionate friendships that cluster around new movements.

The various public offices held by my mother at this period of her life kept her in touch with the men and women of the state. Her long term of service as a

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member of the Providence School Committee—the only public office then open to the women of Rhode Island—familiarized her with the procedure of public bodies and the educational needs of the city; and her official connection as secretary of the Rhode Island Woman Suffrage Association and president of the Rhode Island Women's Club, came at the most interesting period of their history. What small influence she had was used in indirect ways to further the interests of younger professional women. And this help was the more appreciated because it was unlooked for, and usually came at the darkest moment of a career. My mother was keen to detect a rising wind, and her alert mind was ever on the lookout for the new opportunities opening to women. When the prospects for the admission of women to Brown University seemed most remote she manoeuvred diligently, and tacked and veered, hugged the shore and stood out to sea, until she led a small group of women to a conference with President Andrews that brought about the millennium.

But as these various movements lost their pioneer character, her interest in them waned, and she retired to the companionship of her books. She now added to her library Lecky's *History of Rationalism*; Mill, *On Liberty*; Lewes' *History of Philosophy*; Taine's *English Literature*; and eight volumes of Spencer's *Synthetic Philosophy*. These last bulge with manuscript notes, abstracts and synopses of chapters, and restatements of cardinal principles:—

It is denied that the Ideal conceived by man is superior to the real as it is conceived in itself.—Man lowers the real by his inadequate apprehension of it.—Psychology seeks the law of correlation.—The scope of Psychology: The laws of the relations between my states of feelings and the operations of my nervous system. p. 98, vol. I.

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But the belief that they are related is of a remotely inferential character (like the 'interpretation of verbal signs') p. 100; etc., etc.

My mother was at home among her books, and records her devotion to them in lines of unaffected simplicity:

I love you well, beloved! Companions dear,
Lewes! 't was through thy subtle insight clear
I first divined the dispensation new;
Then, Laureate, burst thy vision on my view—
Of "statelier Edens" seen from poet's sphere.
Pale Brontë, and thou stronger woman-soul,
Your patient strength has lightened all my load;
Spencer! thy mighty grasp will ere control
My toiling thought along truth's arduous road.
Each page meets eyes of mine with charmèd looks,
My heart is yours, O little band of books!

Poetry and philosophy, ethics and esthetics were to her one and the same thing. Each, a—

Portal set apart
For Sage, for student, and the pure in heart;

and the small library of books that grew with her needs reflected the growth of her mind, rather than a diversity of tastes.

In 1893 Mrs. Palmer prepared for the Rhode Island exhibit at the World's Columbian Exposition, *A List of Rhode Island Literary Women; with some account of their work*. This unpretentious bibliography involved her in a vast amount of labor, but brought her in contact with the women writers of the State, and

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led to the formation of the Rhode Island Short Story Club, a group of professional literary women. The List is not an impressive one, but contains a good many curious bits of information about local writers supplied by Mr. Sidney S. Rider, and is much in demand. My mother records the fact that a woman was at one time the editor and publisher of the first Rhode Island newspaper. While of her old friend and leader in the suffrage movement, Mrs. Elizabeth Buffum Chace, a contributor to various publications "on topics connected with the abolition of slavery, the enfranchisement of women, the claims of the children of the State, the rights of the North American Indian, the value of arbitration," she remarks in passing:

Never rode to the wrong's redressing
A worthier paladin.

In time the *True Flag* ran its course, and the long apprenticeship that had given my mother an easy command of her pen came to an end. For a while she succeeded in writing serial stories for one of the New York journals, but literary tastes were changing, new and younger writers were entering the field, and she at length found a new outlet for her activities.

In 1894, on her appointment as State Factory Inspector for Rhode Island she gave up writing and devoted her time to the duties of the new office. She was not a sentimentalist and for this reason was the better able to impress her views on hard-headed mill superintendents. At that time the Rhode Island factories swarmed with children of French Canadian parentage who were under age. As it was difficult—in fact, impossible—to learn the truth from their parents my mother would ask of every child she met, "*Quel âge avez-vous?*"—a question that usually elicited a correct

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response. In case of doubt she would write to the parish priest in Canada for a copy of the birth certificate. Persistent efforts at length drove the small children from the mills. When my mother remarked one day to the overseer of a spinning room, "Isn't that child under age?" "No," he replied doggedly. "But I don't intend to keep him here. *He spoils the looks of the room!*"

With her usual thoroughness she inspected the mills early and often, penetrating to remote country districts where official visitors were seldom seen. On one occasion, finding the mill closed she jotted down, while waiting for the train, her impressions of the day. These present a homely picture of New England village life thirty years ago, during a period of industrial depression—difficult to realize—when there was not work enough for all.

AN IDLE MILL

A thick wood of chestnuts and birches—at the base, ferns growing breast high and startled columbines standing alone in patches—

The path to the Mill is scarcely discernible.

"Which way to the Mill?" The station agent of whom I enquired was reading a letter. He looked up. "The shortest way is along the track. Go about as far again as the first switch, turn to your right and cross the trestle. You'll see the chimney. It's safe walking, and nearer than the road."

The train which had just disappeared was warranted not to repeat itself till late in the afternoon, and I had, therefore, the track to myself. It was a peaceful looking grass-grown track—no-way suggestive of catastrophies. The blue June sky was veiled with a faint haze, with here and there a light cloud floating lazily eastward. There were woods to the left—birch and chestnut. A water

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course rushed under the trestle, with tall grasses and blue flag alongside. The mill stood in the distance. I looked and listened. But the rushing water was the only sound. The Mill was still. The curtains were undrawn. The machinery could be seen through the windows—ready to resume its functions. The passage through the office building was open at each end and a comfortable room fitted with desks and chairs could be seen, like the looms in the mill, ready for work—but empty.

Across the road and up and down as far as one could see, stood the tenements, with the grass grown high in the door yards, the shades down. Unoccupied. Up on the rising ground was a fine house—the closed blinds faded with sun and rain, the gate fastened, no sign of life without or within. I walked the length of the village street without meeting a living thing. It was a fair rolling country, a pleasant place to be, but it was a deserted village, a body without a soul. A little way on stood a small schoolhouse, the door wide open. Thankful for a sign of life I stepped into the open doorway. A prepossessing gentleman was teaching a dozen children. He paused to invite me in, and politely directed me to the nearest farmhouse.

“Walk in,” said the mistress of the house. “Some one to carry you to ———? I’ll see if Miss Korn’s working her horse to-day. The Mill? Oh, the mill’s been closed ten years or more. There’s an agent lives here to look after the property, and sometimes the insurance people come around to look it over. I’d be glad to see times as they were when it used to run. Why, there aren’t more than seven or eight families left in the town. I’ve got four children. My son works on the road. When my boy was a little shaver he used to ask the Super, Mr. Pierre Dempsey, ‘When are you going to start the mill?’ and Mr. Pierre would say, ‘When you’re big enough to work for me, Jimmy, I’ll start the mill.’”

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"And what do the girls do?" "Oh, there ain't nothing for them to do—more'n housework. The eldest one she had a job in the ——— Mill and went there and back on the train morning and night before the trouble. She's hoping they'll settle the strike so as she can go back to work. There's Miss Korn coming. Yes, she'll hitch up and drive you on if you'll pay her a dollar."

A small volume of sonnets, published in San Francisco in 1909, was the fruit of several years' residence in California. Here the ebb and flow of a life detached from the main current, and wholly different from that of New England, left on my mother's mind an impression of splendor and unreality. California, with its romantic past and unstereotyped present, seemed to her a land of infinite possibilities for the free play of individual energies and the development of creative impulses, and she ventured on a confident prediction for the future:

Composite, unassimilable, crude
As Her unsmelted ores, the social state
Where differing races struggle to create
Their planes of life anew. Needs must intrude
Fallacious dreams, false reasonings which delude
Th' unpracticed mind; But, She'll in time be great
Enough to find, amid the turns of fate,
The Way to shun—the Way to be pursued.
Purples and gold in groves and orchards glow,
And, housed in pearl, the Abalones cling
To the wet rocks: Mid fairest scenes at home
Her people dwell, and tides of travel flow
From ends of earth;—Such various folk they bring
As once they brought up to the Caesars' Rome.

Owing to impaired eyesight that limited reading or

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writing to a few minutes a day, and obliged her to record in sonnet form the impressions that crowded her brain, my mother spent much of her time in the open. She was now seventy, but tireless in her energies. She made several gardens, one of them a garden by the sea—at Santa Cruz:

So close, the breakers tossed among the flowers
Their flecks of foam!

and on the long walks that she took she was sustained by her imaginative hopes, and a resolute will, as she wandered in strangely silent and beautiful places—in remote spots, where—

the Shooting Star
With its pale grace and scent of solitude,—
A Spirit more than blossom—flowers alone
Within the Canyon's jealous heart, unknown.

or—

in the muffled Wood
Where ferns refreshed their plummy branches spread,
And Lilacs bud, as if they understood
This medium of Dreams wherein we tread
Beset by sparkling chains the spiders spin,—
While from th' unsated sea the fog rolls in.

During occasional visits to London my mother wrote a considerable number of little poems that reflect her mood as a dweller in the great city of which she felt herself to be a part. From our lodging-house window in Bloomsbury she looked out in the twilight at the dim shapes passing and repassing in a November fog that, to her, 'commemorates the multitude':

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Coming and going, blurred against the rain,
Absorbing as they pass the early gloom,
I see the people, through my window-pane—
See—when the firelight falters in the room.
The posts and lintels dim that frame the Square
Clad in the vague grey dominoes they wear . . .

And again, from the Thames Embankment and
Boadicea's statue, she saw London transformed by the
touch of Spring:

. . . Ere one knows
What 't is that's happening, a sudden green
Comes to the pointed buds that stand between
You and the sky: And in the narrow close
Of a small Square, the pale pink Almond blows.

At this time her memory served her well. As we
read Gibbon's *Rome* she stored in her mind pictures
that unfolded themselves in a later series of sonnets.
She followed with interest even such dark reading as
that of Meredith's poetry, which she likens to a kind
of wine:

Subtlest of potions! Rare compoundings brewed
From secrets of the soul when an eclipse
Reveals them! Bitter-sweet upon the lips
And aether to the brain, the draught renewed
Sustains us, tho' its pungencies delude:
And if the toxic exaltation trips
The feet on common roads, it still equips
For paths beyond the paths we've yet pursued.

The lure of 'paths beyond' finally beckoned my
mother, for a second time, to Rome.

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White and blue,
The city of my thoughts lies spread to view—
Under the argent of December skies . . .

she wrote in retrospect—no longer a stranger within the gates of the modern capital, as she had described herself upon a former visit:

As we approach the city the train increases its speed a little. Our travelling companions suddenly grow quiet, and begin to cast anxious glances at the huge portmantaus stowed solidly in the racks overhead. Suddenly the door of the compartment opens. The blue-frocked fachinos are waiting for the terrible luggage, and a long vista of approved modern station accommodation meets the eye. Naples greets you with friendly interest from the moment your luggage is deposited on the marble steps on the custom house. Naples is glad to see you. The concierge of your house suspects that you are an artist and flings open the window upon a balcony, with a shy smile at your pleasure in the street below. The shopkeeper eyes you kindly as he readjusts his corals. Even the lean, large-eyed cab horse, chewing his frugal but aesthetic meal of crimson clover, seems to meditate as to whether you will drive to Pompeii or take the train! But Rome pays little heed to the newcomer and you feel an oppressed wonderment as to whether in the maze of modernity you will be able to find the antiquity you have come in search of.

It is noon of the second day. We descend the long steep flights through the tower of the Capital. The April air is warm. Some boys in costume are sunning themselves on the steps. A flower-girl thrusts a bunch of pansies into the button-hole of my jacket. The people are taking their nooning, stretched prone upon the pavement and steps of the churches, or are eating their long black roll of bread.

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I am tired, but I do not care to rest. I am hungry, but I do not care to eat. The feeling of estrangement has altogether vanished. The Rome of my dreams is real, and I am at home in it.

From Rome she brought away, in 1914, some thoughtful verses on the Campagna; a diminutive block of marble from the House of the Vestals—which she always intended to return; a small image of a dancing faun wrapped in cotton wadding, and these two quatrains to his memory:

He danced for joy because the world was fair
And rhythm caught his footsteps unaware.
Too wise, too indiscreet—his only care
Was, that the fruits of mischief fell elsewhere.

Airy escape from brooding Nature's plan;
A promise—still to be redeemed to Man:
His loves so light we'll not too closely scan—
Those loves wherewith Love's troubles all began.

In the spring of 1914 we journeyed on to England, and settled ourselves in the suburbs of London:

I recall (writes my mother) the early warmth and charm of that Spring and Summer which now seem very far away, and, with them, that sense of repose to which one has lived—as I have—a rather long and busy life, feels, for some unexplained reason, entitled.

Then, one August morning, there appeared a brief headline in the newspaper whose import every startled reader understood at a glance. There were only five words: "Britain will not desert France," but they seemed to alter the aspect of the universe. Henceforth, ease and repose,

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for the mind or for the body, might be suited to the inhabitants of some other planet, not, certainly, to those of our own.

A year has elapsed, and on this anniversary of the beginning of the War I am dwelling, in common with the multitude whose interests I have shared from day to day, on emotions which have touched the foundations of feeling, and on sentiments, hitherto undreamed of in our philosophies, which have now become a permanent part of them. And when I ask myself what are the qualities which I shall ever associate with the England of the year just ended, I think of her sustained and self-forgetful hospitality to the refugees from a despoiled country, of the faith and charity with which occasions have been met, and of that imaginative outlook that has already given birth to the new type of courage.

For the two years that we remained in London my mother continued her morning walks through the streets of the city, wandering unmolested in and out among the Thames dockyards, where steamers flying the Japanese flag were unloading, resting on the benches of the parks and commons, now deserted except for a chance couple of soldiers or marines on leave, lunching in the overcrowded restaurants, and occupying, occasionally, a bench in the now half-empty pit of some theatre where a hastily assembled company of foreign actors strove to impart to England a new sense of international values. She was one with the people, and shared in the wistful hope, reflected on every countenance, of a short war that would lead out into a better future.

In 1916, gathering her scattered Lares and Penates once more around her in Rhode Island, she became absorbed in the problems of home-making. At the age of seventy-seven she was still a superior house-

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keeper and her love of order and beauty was reflected in the appointments of her simple home. She would go softly from room to room, straightening a rug or a chair, dusting, replacing, rearranging, until the whole house wore an air of comfort and pleasantness. Then she would sit down to her writing, and finally rest, seated in the window with a book in her hand. In the early twilight she would exercise her memory by repeating French poetry, greeting me as I came in the door, with—

Byzantins de Byzance, écoutez à vos portes!

or a spirited rendering of *Mimi Pinson*, with an impressive pause at the line—

Mimi n'a pas l'âme vulgaire . . .

I think that there must have been some French blood in mother's veins, from the extreme delicacy of her life and her solicitude for fragile things, combined with a fearlessness in the presence of destructive forces. Revolutions, which she likens to—

. . . mountain storms that gather unreminded
Of some frail things that make for life's adorning,

she accepted as part of the order of the Universe. Nothing terrified her that was great, and she escaped the fever and fret of ordinary life, from the fact that she was content to remain an onlooker:

To the cohorts the Gates are open wide . . .
And are there none to fly and close the Gates?
I—I—cannot—because with dreams I strove
To end the verses I have penned to love—

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And have no strength to go—

But—presently

To see

What the Barbarians do within the Gate

On the high terrace I will sit, and wait.

The following summers, spent at Outpost Farm, came as an interlude and a breathing spell in the midst of the war. Here, my mother, with an ardor that eighty years of activity had not dimmed and an enthusiasm more or less feigned, threw herself into our project for a small war garden, and hoed and watered and weeded. With the aid of a cord and a tape-measure she laid out a strawberry bed, and set tomato plants in the ground. She tied up refractory rose bushes with soft white strips of cloth, and trained the grapevine that grew beside the well. In her own particular corner of the woodshed she kept her bright new hammer, a slender screw-driver, some tacks and twine, and a rake, hoe, and trowel. The trowel she polished with an oily cloth. The hoe was never thrown carelessly to the ground, and from frequent contact with her white hands took on, in the course of time, an elegant, almost a distinguished appearance. In fact these tools, symmetrically arranged on hooks or shelves, resembled objects in a museum, rather than agricultural implements.

The garden work over, she rested for a while in the open doorway. Then she would put on a shade hat with long black velvet strings, and taking her walking staff that she kept beside the front door she would climb the hill in the direction of the blueberry patch. The path that wound up to the clearing was densely overgrown with bay and laurel and sumac, and as you entered the woods, disappeared altogether, but the trail was marked by a series of white hand-

FANNY PURDY PALMER

kerchiefs that fluttered from the lower branches of certain trees, recognized as landmarks by the wanderer. In the afternoon, after watching my garden operations from the depths of an immense easy chair she would make a second lonely excursion into the woods—this time, in search of firewood, waiting in some pleasant place with her load until I came to meet her.

There is no doubt that the social upheaval following the war and the apparent defeat of many of her cherished hopes, broke upon my mother with a shock of bewilderment. But her strong and resolute nature rallied, and she set to work courageously to adjust her life anew. The will that regulated her life imposed a constraint that—

Like the weight of Honour . . .

Lies on the tides, and curbs each measured phrase;

and, at the same time, left her free to work in harmony with a rhythmic order that she detected in 'the ways obscure of the Plan,' for—

. . . when an Age is rent

By storms of acquiescence and dissent,

.
Then, as from strings responsive to no hand,

Which chord or discord yield as we elect,

There sounds a strain whence souls at birth are stirred;

And from this rhythm—hard to understand,

And from these measures—idle to reject—

Life to the Law adds its compulsive word.

Frail but erect, my mother continued her activities, revealing herself to a few in the charm of her conversation, the gaiety of her repartee, the gentle irony,

OUTPOST MESSAGES

the eager sympathies, the hidden yearnings that combined to make up her elusive personality.

During the last years of her life she was engaged upon three plays in which she undertook to develop her theory of an evolutionary progress dependent on the individual will. She detected in mass emotionalism a tendency to intellectual and moral drift, and felt that for our own times, at least, a life of partial detachment was best calculated—paradoxical as it may seem—to develop in each one a sense of responsibility for all. For a solution of the complexities of social life she looked to a better understanding between men and women. “Less courageous people than we,” she writes, “are seeking relief from the friction of oppositions in coalitions—mere palliatives. Our men and women are bound to find theirs in mutual comprehension—which is cure.”

Mrs. Palmer did not live to articulate distinctly a train of thought developed in seclusion. Like her *Sibyl*, she grew—

Older and older; smaller; closer furled;
Yet sharing not her wisdom with the world.

At the same time, in sibylline fashion she gave much by concealing much, unaware that her life had been sufficiently prolonged to illustrate in the working of heart and mind and hand, the principle of the law of growth. She thought lightly of her sonnet to *A Sibyl*, saying that it was a mere pleasantry, and led nowhere. For she realized that the world pays small heed to one whose strength is spent, and who is to be regarded merely—as old. She looked, naturally, to youth for the pure enthusiasm that spills its fire on the shore. But she also found a certain quality in the old and in those who have undergone the more profound ex-

FANNY PURDY PALMER

periences of life, as she scanned their faces for the
"shining residue" that remains, as the complexities
that obscure a simple nature fade away, and—

. . . melting pot and world-wide winnowing fan
Consume and bruise and sift,
To leave at last more gold grains as their gift.

HENRIETTA R. PALMER

*153 Power Street
Providence, R. I.
October, 1923.*

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OUTPOST FARM

*Her form so small a leaf may now enfold,
And screened therein her questioners she shuns:—
Swift plays the light across her visage old
Whose fire was kindled with the birth of Suns.
She has her habitation in the trees,
And mid their leafy traceries hides her lore:
She speaks, with the soft lisp of homing bees,
More and more rarely, words she spake before!
Into her dreams her substance has been wrought;
Passion and Grief have swept her as a lyre;
Much has she given to the much besought,
Till all's consumed, except her Sun-born fire!
Older and older; smaller; closer furled;
Yet sharing not her wisdom with the world.*

A SIBYL

"Of the Valley and the Sea."

THE ROAD TO OUTPOST FARM

I

Narrow road, with turns misleading,
Keep your secrets . . . few will know—
Since so close you cling to Nature—
Whence you came . . . or where you go.

II

In the Spring when Arethusa
Robes herself in pearly rose,
Cautious steps within your meadows
Sometimes find the spot she chose . . .

III

June comes: Shadows guard your waysides;
Undespoiled their depths within
Blooms the laurel . . . In its shelter
There's the Indian Moccasin . . .

IV

August noon-day. . . While I'm resting—
Summer dullness to beguile—
Lop-eared rabbit comes to greet me—
With his predatory smile!—

V

And a martin from the treetop
Speculating on it all,
Hears the crows beyond the cornfield
Issuing a council call;

VI

As through Nature's deep intrenchments
Stern, narrower, goes the way,
O, my road of many treasures,
Where strange actors have their day.

VII

Dost thou think, Road unassuring,
That we mortals are astray
When we claim within thy fortress,
Lordship over such as they?

VIII

Then the Road—that never answers—
Mounts and mounts and disappears,
Through an altitude revealing
Wild grapes!—where an opening clears.

BENNY

Benny is nine . . . shy . . . spare . . .
Serious eyes . . . home-clipped hair . . .
Benny will greet you with, "Hello!"—
Or, pressed with a question, "Yes" or "No."
(Unbranded as yet with manners, this child,
Who is foster-brother to things of the wild).

But Benny can ride the horse to plow
And find the cows when they're lost in the wood,
And his grandpa says; "Benny's *pretty* good":—
For he's not afraid of the dark or the rain;
Nor at all alarmed by a snake or a bat—
(Though he wears no shoes and he wears no hat.)

All summer he journeys the length of the lane
At an hour when the Shapes in the woods are not
plain—

With our evening milk and the daily mail . . .
Of all he may see on his mile-long way
Not one word does he deign to say;
But he and his dog will glance at each other
As if they had some feelings to smother . . .

With one small hand he steadies the can;
One bare arm encircles the mail,
Till he places both on the door-step stone
And then like a swallow, swoops for home.

Boy and dog through the woods recede . . .
Benny, fleet-footed, keeping the lead . . .

Whither wending, small urchin with questioning eyes?
You will never be docile or worldly-wise . . .
But I think you'll have inklings of life as a whole.
Perhaps you are but a disguise for a Soul . . .

FROST IN SEPTEMBER

A hush stole over the Dawn

At the sight

Of a gossamer veil of crystal white

Flung over the hills and fields

In the night—

And the purple Grackles lowered their flight.

A night to regret! . . . When Summer

Her victor met . . .

Their meeting was known to the Moon alone—

They parted so soon—

But the conquered may not forget.

RELATIVITY

(THE FARM REVISITED)

The bucket and the chain that swung so free
In the Well, are stiff with frost and hung
With Icicles. . . . The oval Pond
Lies, like a mirror of clear glass without a crack. . . .
Beyond . . . are Birches . . . You might call
Their bark snow-white if it were not
In contrast with the snow
That crusts the road unfurrowed by a track.

The vacant house—untenanted these
Four months now—asks nothing of the Solitude . . .
The windows stare. . . . The unused lock
Resists the pressure of its key. . . .
The floor on which I tread creaks solemnly.

A Soul that fluttered back . . . for a brief interval . . .
Into the Body which . . . a moment since . . .
Had been its dwelling place . . .
Might find—as I within this recent home of mine—
Familiar objects
That have lost their meaning:

There is the Hearth . . . I might make up a fire . . .
 . . . There's life in fire!—But it's soon gone! . . .
So first I'll fill this empty Vase
With living greens from out of doors,
Say Juniper . . . Juniper? . . . The little branch
Would wonder why 't was wrenched
 From its own symmetry!

Old letters lie around . . . last Summer's messages:
 I liked them once But now
 Their errand's ended!

How strange a voice has Solitude!
How seldom have I heard all it can say!
But now; *'Begone! You are not needed here to-day!'*

IN THE AUTUMN WOODS

I

Fires of the Sumach burn and die
In the windless woods, and withal—
Aliens amid the pageantry—
Are the Pines, blue-green, and tall!

II

Here the wealth of the forest lies—
Conjuror's coinage!—at my feet.
'End of an epoch!' a new voice cries:
. . . A ground bird twitters *'Defeat!'*

III

A youthful owl from his port-hole peers
At some little brown mice that run
On their cushioned toes, with their stiffened ears
When he spares their lives for fun!

IV

And the armored cruisers of Summer air
Are swarming about a tree
Where honey is stored—which none may share
With this armored company . . .

V

Fallacy lurks in the golden weather,
Flaws appear in the fair design:
Age and Winter are coming—together:—
Doom to the trailing Vine! . . .

VI

Yet the uplift gay of the Chipmunk's feather
Flaunts, like a flag on the wall;
And around me—proud and calm as ever!—
Are the Pines—blue-green and tall.

THE WORLD WITHOUT

*Yet is there solace for his hampered lot
Whose hurts are laid 'neath patient Nature's spell;
Feast of the eye, thrill of the heart are not
Her purpose set. Sufficient 't is and well
When pain and joy have borne their fruitage ripe,
She finds within her world some nobler type.*

IN THE MAKING
"Sonnets of California"

THE DESERT'S BOON

We stopped at Caliente, I remember,—
Where the Transcontinentals pass,
 East-bound, and west . . .
 . . . Some half-breeds pattering with clay;
A station with a tiny plot of grass; . . .
Shine of snow-flurried sandhills far away:
 . . . The desert in December.

Five minutes . . . and our train was moving on . . .
A restless fellow passenger remarked
“I think we changed our engineer: I will
 find out”. . . He rose . . . Then, suddenly,
“Look at this cabin near the water tank!—
There is a name—in chalk—upon the door!
 Haven of Heart's desire . . .
And,—there's his pony and his coil of wire!”
A smile went round . . . next he was asked:—
That object flashing back the sun—off there?—
“O, that?—A desert tent . . . some sick man's home.”
At this a pause . . . then he, in lowered tone:—
“A fellow who is wanted—slipped the
 guard, last week, right here. . . .
And really, so it seems, did disappear.”

That night I dreamed the Desert was
the Universe,
And men came to its bar to learn
their doom . . .
The sick man died . . . whispering
I am no worse . . .
(To such the desert sometimes gives this boon.)

The fugitive—untraced—began
With hunger, and lost hope, to expiate
The harm he'd done. . . . Released
At last to the uncensuring Whole

Whose laws supreme divulge that
sequent sphere
For which each Soul perverse
May be regenerate. . . .

The owner of the cabin flagged the train
I travelled by . . . Entering he bore
Well-filled portfolio . . . and a sack of ore . . .
His eyes said,—O, you need not welcome *me*
. . . I live alone . . .
And turning to the desert, shone:
I shall come back to you—my own!

I waked . . . and felt the throbbing of the train

Upon its way:—

And saw—face pressed to window pane,—

Starry Dark yield to the wooing Light;

The widening Desert, and another Day!

INDIA

. . . While India dreams . . .

Her passion-flowers entwine
Their knotted tendrils round her fettered wrists . . .
She cannot lift the veil whose mists enshrine
The Orient's secret in her troubled breast. . . .
Nor yet define
Its meaning to the cold ear of the West.

Her eyes impassioned, read,—
Scribed on the tables of an ancient Age,—
These immemorial overtures, which plead
When body unto Soul deposes the lead:—
Thine heart to Pity give . . .
Thine hand to aid . . .
Thy goods beyond thy need,
With all humility renounce:—

Her eyes may read . . . her lips may not pronounce
This formula . . . It holds
A solvent for the sorrows of the world:
. . . Even yet its terms may reach
Our hurts . . . without interpolated speech . . .

. . . Otherwise . . . Be they heard
In human surge, which safely bears—
Thro' ebb and flow and undertow—
To shore, its motive word! . . .

ACESTIANS

I

They say, it was the women burned the fleet
So that Æneas now could sail no more
From Sicily . . . They found Acestia fair;—
With grey globed olives, heavy clustered grapes
And ripening grain . . . Life brought them joy
To mitigate the memory of Troy.

.

So:—They made choice—one night—
And set the boats upon the beach alight . . .
Watching, until they'd burned . . . Then
To their waiting mates returned
And cried, "Rejoice. Our wanderings are o'er.
. . . Our safety won . . . *We* may escape
Oblivion."

II

At dawn . . . a sound of oars . . . from off the Sea.
A remnant fleet . . . a winnowed company.
Æneas at the prow . . .
Ahead . . . uncertainty . . .

III

Yet think not all the women of Acestia
Stayed behind when thus he sailed . . .
Some did not shirk their share
Of perilous adventuring:

IV

Did Carthage burn: Did Dido fail,—
They too were there—
Part of the wreckage such bold quests entail:
. . Not unaware
That, for their scars, untarnished heraldry
One day they'd wear.

Now this of these dead women I relate,
Because one whom I know—herself a ghost—
Talked with their ghosts, of late,
One evening—in Albano.

A PHARISEE UNBLAMED

Ended at length is her long, small life,
Lacking in passion or power
To pull up, or pull out, in the strife . . .
Content with a minor role,
She built no accessible tower
As breathing place for her soul.

Yet a stalwart she and loyal friend,
(This memory dear is mine
And it makes for all else an amend.)
For this, at the parting here,
With such memories I will entwine
The flowers that dress her bier.

A SONNET SEQUENCE

I

O, SHIP OF STATE. 1776-1922

O, Ship of State—launched on the current strong
Of tidal hour that would not brook delay!—
Taut was thy rigging to withstand decay,
O, gallant risk!—They did not build thee wrong
For the rough voyage thou must still prolong
Over uncharted and adventurous way!—

And captains bold in sacrifice were they
Who took the helm! . . . Others, the crew among,
Withered, and went their way . . . So, nobly manned;
Course, bravely planned; with boundless hopes
equipped;
To port you came!—with floating flag that dipped
To pledge the promise all should understand! . . .

Now, world-wide waves our good Ship's ribs explore,
And Memory's heroes guide her course no more.

II

ANCESTORS. 1776

My ancestors, 't is true, stood by their King:
Resigned their homesteads to the People's will,
And in Tioga's wilds—were loyal still.

They might have done some much unworthier thing
Than, exiled in the wilderness to bring
The dignity of Liberty; the thrill
Of self-set labors all, in turn, fulfill
Under unwritten laws that left no sting.

On sombre slabs of Cemetery stones
Their names remain. I, as a child, have heard
One centenarian talk of those interred
These stones beneath . . . where now the wind be-
moans

In ghostly tones of wonderment and pain .
That freedom—which the world did not attain.

III

TRAGEDY

He was a roofer, roofing in the sun;—
The August sun, in torrid city street;—
But all the glare and stifle of the heat
Made him not glad to know his work near done:

His home . . . sick wife . . . the new-born little
one . . .

Few comforts in their crowded zone . . . defeat
Of all the plans he never could complete . . .
Such reasonable plans.—Why—why—unwon!

And yet in this dark hour *he* must be strong!
So, courage! courage!—fastening the tile . . .
He hears a voice . . . ‘*O, Mitri, come! She’s gone!*’
He stares . . . the roof’s edge sudden looks a mile . . .
His hammer drops—like summons to a fall . . .
He staggers on . . . trying to grasp it all!

WITHIN ASYLUM WALLS

Oh, Mary was alone that night—
For Patrick did not come . . .
No: Patrick came not home that night! . . .
And Mary was alone.

At dawn—her baby at her breast,—
From railroad track and train
They rescued her . . . arrested her . . .
And said she was insane.

For forty years her home has been
Inside Asylum wall . . .
And unto two or three it's known
She's not insane at all.

She scours the kitchen cans and pans,
She's shrewd and smart and strong . . .
And daily saves a little share
Of food—to carry home.

Mind's clock will stop, like any clock
Upset, and shoved around—
The hands can never feel their hour
Until the key is found.

But chiefly, what the State will pay,
When they shall let her out:—
How much her board; how much her wage;—
Is what she talks about.

Strange folks who call her 'Mother' come
As years go on,—to call . . .
She looks at them distrustfully. . . .
My children are all small.

She's brave about the kitchen work—
No longer smart or strong;—
She's eighty now—and more than that,—
She cannot keep on long . . .

So, Patrick's dead . . . and far and wide
Their scattered children are . . .
But as she left them there that night,
To Mary, still they are.

THE WORLD WITHIN

*Vine on the wall of my English home,
March hath brought thee a draught of wine!
Drink of the cup, with its beaded foam,
To the day of thy life, O Vine!*

*Swinging to feel where the west winds go;
Swaying to follow the blackbird's call;
Everything tells thee the world to know
Is the world outside of thy wall!*

*Yet still to its stones thy buds are pressed,
And thy heart never holds a doubt
That constancy to thy wall is best,
Though the rest have not found this out!*

*And by and by when the roses fall,
And the teller of secrets is mute,
Content art thou to adorn this wall
With a glory of leaves and fruit.*

*While the narrow gateway's breadth and length
Will be clamped around and about
With rivets, wrought of thine own brave strength,
And—closed to the world without!*

POSSESSION

"Dates and Days in Europe"

TO SHELLEY

Frail,—swift,—with longings, beyond life, aflame,—
And revelations! Voice that Nature knows
Thou had'st to speak with! and the toppling snows
And Ocean winds that at thy calling came
Brought ardor like thine own—that naught could
tame!

Thence sounds, abrupt, thy challenge to disclose
The sorrows Insincerities impose;—
The wrongs which we disguise by righteous name!

From the far Unapparent, came to thee
Strength for the utterance of prophecy;—
For—more than poet—*thou wert poetry!*

MYSTICISM

(*Originally entitled, A BUILDER*)

I

There is a structure of the Yesterdays—
Built in Space immense—
Whose great Designer meant that it should be
A dwelling place for pure Intelligence:

Palatial are its lines . . .
Carven and coined by Thought
The Portal set apart
For Sage, for student, and the pure in heart:
. . . Rays, from the Dome down sent,
Are as the shelter of a firmament.

II

. . . Within are chambers vast—
Lighted as by the light of dawns o'ercast . . .
. . . From vaulted hall
A keen air blows thro' all . . .

. . . Steep Stairs wind upward
From the trodden floor—
Like ladders seen in dreams whose end we seek—
But see no more!
And toiling ever on these Stairs are they

Who long have bent the knee
Unto Immanuel Kant's philosophy:—
Still groping toward the steeper height,
For stronger light
Whereby to face
The Master's final, flinching 'Postulate'
Which he has bidden them to "tolerate."

III

. . . This Palace fair
A prison of Illusions has become
As Time moves on . . .
The walls seem narrower: the ceiling low . . .
Voices that once were clear—
Are dumb.

The baffling Stairs are peopled now
With Shades of Doubt . . .
The Portal that the toilers entered by
Swings inward,—but not Out!—
. . . Some would, perhaps, escape from there,
They might, indeed, escape,
But—where? . . .

"However, pure reason itself is not free from illusions of an anthropomorphic nature and in the last resort we must tolerate a subtle anthropomorphism."

KANT'S CRITIQUE OF PURE REASON

THE SECRETS OF THE STREAM

So broad, so deep, the Stream that all we know
Of living things are carried on its breast
By the persuasive and compelling flow

That carries none distinctive from the rest
But all to others bound, by common link,
As are the waves that bear us on—impressed

To that succession, wherefrom none may shrink,
But with the mighty waters, pausing not,
Make their majestic passage toward the brink.

Faintly remembered, quite—at times—forgot,
The meanings of the Stream, for you and me,
Saving those speculations on a lot—

Tethered to destinies we cannot see,—
And for the startled wonder of the mind
At what we are,—and what we yet may be!

For never have these rapid waves defined
Rights or rewards that lure us to exist:
But each, himself, alone, the way shall find;—

Alone, appraise the errors that persist
As, onward borne by silent current strong,
We know no pause—wherein we might desist.

Span of the hour desires cannot prolong;
Our All—with it— we render to the Whole.
More,—better,—we might give:—We're borne along.

Proud waves flash back their pictures of the Soul:
Swift rapids toss to foam the dreams of youth
Which grasp the glittering bubbles, to enroll

Their radiant dazzle as the gleam of Truth!—
While the recording waters, on their way
Make transcripts clear of what we are—forsooth!

Of deeds; of dreams; of all the parts we play;
Of sacrifices that we spare our fate! . . .
Till the link breaks . . . and with serene delay

Deep slumber comes—Life's pains to palliate;—
While Being transubstantiate attends
The issue of its new novitiate. . . .

TRANSLATIONS

LE PASSÉ QUI FILE

By Grégoire Le Roy

La vieille file, et son rouet
Parle de vieilles, vieilles choses ;
La vieille a les paupières closes,
Et croit bercer un vieux jouet.

Le chanvre est blond, la vieille est blanche.
La vieille file lentement,
Et pour mieux l'écouter, se penche
Sur le rouet bavard qui ment.

Sa vieille main tourne la roue
L'autre file le chanvre blond.
La vieille tourne, tourne en rond,
Se croit petite et qu'elle joue.

Le chanvre qu'elle file est blond,
Elle le voit et se croit blonde ;
La vieille tourne, tourne en rond
Et la vieille danse la ronde.

AN OLD WOMAN SPINNING

By Grégoire Le Roy (Belgian)

A woman is spinning . . . The whirling wheel
Talks to her thoughts of old, old, things,
And her eyelids droop as it whirls and sings
In drowsy murmurs, till she with joy
Seems to be hugging some childish toy.

The flax is blonde . . . the spinner is blanched . . .
She is leaning forward to hear
What it is that babbles in her ear
From the wheel as it flies.
Filling her thoughts with its pleasing lies.

One wrinkled hand is guiding the wheel;
With the other she twirls the flax,
But her old, old, self is far astray—
Though the spinning does not relax . . .

Soft and blonde is the tress she spins . . .
Soft and blonde are her tresses, too . . .
And her feet are light as she twirls
In the round
Choosing her partner anew.

Le rouet tourne doucement,
Et le chanvre file de même ;
Elle écoute un ancien amant
Murmurer doucement qu'il l'aime.

Le rouet tourne un dernier tour,
Les mains s'arrêtent désolées,
Car les souvenirs d'amour
Avec le chanvre étaient filées.

(Mon Cœur pleure d'autrefois.)

Editions du *Mercure de France*.

Drowsily, slowly the wheel whirls on . . .
Straightening and winding the soft blonde thread,
Softly a voice in her ear speaks low
Words, that were once so true;—
“Sweetheart . . . listen . . . I . . . love you”. . .

The wheel has twirled in its final round,
And the ends of the flax are smoothly wound . . .

Now where is the partner she chose for the dance?
And where is the lover whose love she won?
Startled, she stares, with a desolate glance . . .

There is nothing here but the yarn she has spun.

LA FIN DE LA RONDE

Byzantins de Byzance, écoutez à vos portes !

Les pas des barbares cohortes

Endeuillent le silence

De rudes cadences

Et chantent les effrois de la venue prochaine

Dans le vent tiède de la plaine.

Aujourd'hui les chansons et la mort pour demain !

Toute la volupté du vin

Dont nos amours s'enivrent

Et la joie des livres

Qui chantent l'épopée languide de leur gloire

Encore au fond de nos mémoires ;

Et les carillons clairs de mille campaniles,

Et tous nos grands dieux puérils

Aux yeux d'étranges pierres

Illustres et claires

Où les prêtres tremblants voyaient dans l'avenir

Les hordes barbares venir ;

Demain, demain et tout au gai soleil levant,

Sera de la poussière au vent !

Aux barbares, nos filles

Donneront, tranquilles

En la perfide joie des grands sourires vagues,

De leurs longs doigts blanc l'or des bagues.

THE END OF THE EPOCH

Byzantines of Byzantium, at your Gates
The rude Barbarian Cohort waits!

Listen! a roar appals,

And silence falls,

As terror grows

At shouts flung to the desert wind that blows.

Today, today, our song. Tomorrow, death.

Yet not to fear we'll yield our latest breath,

For love and wine may bribe

Our poets to describe

This languid epoch at its ebbing tide,

And to the future tell

Stories of campanile and bell,

And of those futile gods within whose eyes

Strange, jeweled lights did to the priests portend

Byzantium's conquest and her glory's end.

Tomorrow, when we face the risen sun,

The bold invaders' conquest will be won.

With a deceitful joy our daughters meet

The conqueror's smiles,

And from their long white fingers draw the rings

To make him golden offerings.

Les esclaves haineux ont déjà fui les portes
Et vont au-devant des cohortes
Porteurs de nos trésors;

Nos icônes d'or,
Nos lamentables christs sur émail rose et bleu,
Aux longs regards vagues et creux;

Nos vierges, aux yeux pleins de mystères charnels,
Nos reliques et nos missels,
De nos défunts espoirs
Souvenirs d'ivoire . . .

Et le rire joyeux des grands enfants barbares
Eclate à l'aspect de nos gloires!

Oh! ce rire, ce rire, et sa joie grande et saine!
Hélas! et sa joie courte et vaine . . .

O grands enfants sauvages
Grands enfants très sages,
Puissiez-vous ne jamais sentir au fond du cœur
Que rien ne vaut qu'on rie ou pleure.

Et venez, gais porteurs de la mort en nos joies!
Nos fronts que la fatigue ploie
De trop de choses sues
Attendent vos massues . . .

Donnez, vous qui savez l'immensité de vivre,
Au feu la sagesse des livres . . .

Already from the Gates the slaves have fled
And at the cohort's head
Our stolen treasures bear,—
Ikons of gold,
The melancholy Christ pictured on rose and blue,
And virgins' eyes abrim with unshed tears,
Relics and Missals rare
Afar they bear,—
Of our dead hopes the ivory souvenirs . . .
While the Barbarian children laugh aloud
To have despoiled our City rich and proud.

They laugh aloud! Their joy is keen and sane.
Alas, for joy so brief and vain!
Great children—and yet wise—
Some day for your surprise
Life will explain
'Tis all the same whether one laughs or cries.

And yet, oh gay iconoclasts, return!
Our brows are furrowed with fatigue
Of all we know,
And we would learn
Whence comes the secret of your buoyant strength,
The confidence and calmness of your looks.
Give, you who know the boundless scope of life,
Unto the flames the wisdom of our books!

Ainsi se clôt le rêve et les chansons se taisent !
Les folles bouches qui me baisent
Ont des râles d'effroi . . .
Je ne sais . . . en moi
Il chante encor comme un oiseau dans une tombe. . . ,
Rentrez, acteurs, la toile tombe !

Toutes portes au large ouvertes aux cohortes !
Ah ! qui courra fermer les portes !
Car moi, trop las du rêve
Des vers que j'achève
Je ne puis et j'irai tout au plus pour les voir
Au haut des terrasses m'asseoir.

Paul Gérardy

So ends the dream. In silence ends the Song.
The lips that kissed no more their kiss prolong.
I—cannot find my part amid the gloom . . .
My song is as a bird's song in a tomb.
In vain we'll seek some motive which enthralls . . .
Spent actors of the past, the curtain falls!

To the cohorts the Gates are open wide . . .
And are there none to fly and close the Gates!
I—I—cannot—because with dreams I strove
To end the verses I have penned to Love—
 And have no strength to go,
 But—presently
 To see
What the Barbarians do within the Gate
On the high terrace I will sit, and wait.

